



Family Support During Deployment: Overview of Research

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DACOWITS Interim Report Number 1

Outline of Briefing

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Background and Data Sources

- Develop interim reports on issues of concern to the Committee:
 - Family Support for Deployment
 - Women's Health Care in the Military with focus on OB-GYN
 - Military Retention Issues.

- Interim reports and final report to draw on the following data sources:
 - DACOWITS focus group data
 - Literature review
 - Survey results.

Background and Data Sources

- Literature review on family support for deployment (sample):
 - *The Military Family* (2002). J. Martin et al.
 - ARI-sponsored post-deployment research 1996-2000. (e.g. Operation Joint Endeavor in Bosnia)
 - *Pathways to the Future: A Review of Military Family Research* (1999). Military Family Research Institute
 - MFRI and MFRC bibliographies and web-based resources on family support research

Background and Data Sources

- Survey results:
 - 2002 Status of Forces Survey (DMDC)
 - 2002 Survey of Spouses of Activated National Guard and Reserve Component Members
 - 2001 Survey of Army Families IV.
- Preliminary DACOWITS focus group data
 - Norfolk Navy Base
 - Ft. Sam Houston
 - Eglin Air Force Base
 - Boston Coast Guard Base
 - Maxwell Air Force Base
 - Coronado Navy Base
 - New Orleans ISC.

Findings: Impact of Deployment on Families

- Military and family are both “greedy” institutions, demanding much of members (*Segal, 1988*).
- Simultaneous demands the military can make of members include separation from family, risk of injury or death, relocation, 24-hour liability for duty, and normative constraints (i.e., codes of behavior).
- Two of these demands— separation from family and risk of injury or death— are characteristic of most deployments and create stress for military families.

Findings: Impact of Deployment on Families

- General stressors that families experience during deployment include:
 - Fear for the sponsor's safety, and the family's ability to cope in sponsor's absence
 - Loneliness
 - Need for information
 - Change in routines resulting in new responsibilities
- The salience and magnitude of each may change depending on the phase of the deployment.

Impact of Deployment on Families: Pre-Deployment

- Information needs are critical. Spouses want information about:
 - Nature of the deployment
 - Safety of their sponsor
 - Options available to communicate with sponsor
 - Departure date and deployment timeline.
- DACOWITS focus group participants expressed that extended family members (e.g., of single soldiers) need to be kept informed about the deployment
- Additional themes from DACOWITS site visits included lack of information about reintegration, unique needs of single parents, need for “hands on” assistance, and⁸

Impact of Deployment on Families: Pre-Deployment

- This phase brings financial, logistical and administrative challenges. Recent survey data collected from family members of activated Reservists found that most family members had:
 - Updated will
 - Power of attorney
 - Dependent ID card.
- But many spouses were unable to establish:
 - Emergency funds
 - Child care arrangements.
- Lack of childcare was also a theme within DACOWITS focus groups.

Impact of Deployment on Families: During Deployment

- During this phase many family members experience:
 - Sadness, feelings of loneliness and isolation
 - Loss of emotional support
 - Fear and uncertainty regarding the sponsor's safety.
- Junior enlisted spouses are more likely to experience isolation, and tend to report greater difficulty coping with deployment. These spouses:
 - Often live significant distances from the base and its support resources
 - Tend to be less involved with other unit spouses.

Impact of Deployment on Families: During Deployment

- Family members may experience stress at having to adapt to new roles and accomplish tasks alone, such as household and auto maintenance, parenting, and handling finances.
- DACOWITS focus group participants noted new roles and responsibilities are most difficult for those deploying for the first time, and for new parents.
- Rumors, often centered around return timelines, spread easily during the deployment phase and can be counterproductive and stressful.

Impact of Deployment on Families: Post-Deployment

- Reunion often requires adjusting to changes in family members and family dynamics:
 - Spouses may have gained new independence
 - Young children may have difficulty adjusting to the presence of the returning sponsor:
“ The kids are the hardest part. They don’t know why you keep leaving. You’ve been gone for a few months and you come back into the house and they don’t know you” (Junior Enlisted Sailor, Coronado).
- The large majority of military spouses report re-adjusting to their marriages within 6 months.
- There is no evidence that deployments are a major cause of divorce — marriages that fail¹²

Impact of Deployment on Families:

Moderating Factors

Characteristics of the deployment	Characteristics of the family
■ Length of the pre-deployment phase ■ Length of deployment phase ■ Public support for the mission ■ Communication opportunities available to military personnel during the mission	■ Spouse maturity/independence ■ Strength of relationship between spouse and service member ■ Family access to support systems and social resources ■ Family financial resources ■ Family deployment experience and awareness of deployment possibility

Organizational Responses to Family Support Needs

- Family support is provided through a number of formal military support programs, services, and activities to include:
 - Preparation for deployment
 - Communication of critical information
 - Linking families with available support resources
 - Reunion support
 - Life-skills education.

Issues and Challenges in Providing Family Support

- Most families adapt and cope well with deployment (Military Family Research Institute, 2003; Bell and Schumm, 2000).
- A number of challenges exist, however, in providing the right services to those who need them. Challenges include:
 - A junior enlisted population that is “at-risk”, but hard to reach
 - Geographic dispersion of military families (particularly for the Reserve Components)
 - Under-awareness and under-utilization of available family support
 - Increases in OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO.

Issues and Challenges in Providing Family Support

- The junior enlisted population is most “at-risk”, but hardest to reach. Compared to spouses of personnel with greater rank and seniority, spouses of junior enlistees:
 - Are younger and relatively more inexperienced with the demands of military life
 - Are more separated socially from other members of the military community, and have fewer social, emotional, and financial resources
 - Are less likely to participate in organized military or unit-based family support and education programs.

Issues and Challenges in Providing Family Support

- Geographic dispersion of military families (particularly for the Reserve Components)
 - 70% of married active-duty military members, and and generally all Guard and Reserve families, live in civilian rather than military housing
 - Families of Guard and Reserve members may live across the state, or across several states, from the armory or installation where their Guard member or Reservist drills
 - Regardless of the sponsor's rank or Service branch, living off-base inhibits awareness and use of base resources, and involvement **17** of family members with the sponsor's unit.

Issues and Challenges in Providing Family Support

- Under-awareness and under-utilization of available family support
 - Many family members are not aware of the range and kinds of resources available to them, and in some cases are either unable or unwilling to take advantage of them
 - DACOWITS focus group participants noted military members are not a consistently reliable conduit for getting information to families
 - “High-touch, not just high tech”. DACOWITS focus group participants are expressing the view that information needs cannot all be solved by technology (e.g., websites). Service members and their families need

Issues and Challenges in Providing Family Support

- OPTEMPO and PERSTEMPO increases are affecting Service members and families in a number of ways. DACOWITS focus group participants have expressed:
 - More work/family conflict from increased work hours and travel
 - Increased anxiety and stress among family members resulting from higher threat levels and uncertainty
 - The need for more staffing of programs (e.g., childcare), updated equipment for support providers, paid post-deployment leave, changes to family care plans (e.g., dependent care criteria) and more reunion support

Conclusion

“We have made great strides in institutionalizing family readiness support since Operation Desert Storm...Improvements to programs and planning for potential contingencies are essential to mission accomplishments. Each contingency presents unique challenges that compel the Department to rely on proven practices and to develop creative responses to unforeseen circumstances”.

-- Memorandum from Charles Abell, Principal Deputy Under
Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness,
Nov.
18, 2002